STREET SPIRIT

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JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

Artists Respond to Homelessness from the Depression to the Present

Artists and Social Justice

This special art issue of *Street Spirit* displays an anthology of artworks on the issues of homelessness, poverty and social justice. This issue compiles the best articles on art and justice to appear in *Street Spirit* from 2006 to 2010.

"The Hand That Takes" Artwork by Eric Drooker

"GI Homecoming" Sandow Birk, Oil on Canvas

"Homeless Go Home" **[Segregation, After Norman Rockwell]** Art by Nili Yosha

by Carol Harvey

Terry "Tresa" Chandler stood in the vaulted art gallery. Her tiny 4-foot-11-inch figure was dwarfed by the colorful painting of a Latino child walking to school past a rotten tomato splashed against graffiti on a wall, ordering "Homeless Go Home."

The child is protected by four adults as he walks to a school for homeless children. Artist Nili Yosha crafted the work after Norman Rockwell's illustration of guards escorting a small black girl into a newly integrated Little Rock school in the civil rights era.

Chandler tilted her head, peering at me with a shy, sardonic smile. "When people say this," she observed, "they are doing it to be mean. It's good that homeless people get to see (this show) too. Then we can tell you if it's real or not. The best thing about this show is it makes people think." Chandler's voice echoed slightly, "I live it. It's so real. All this is so true."

I invited four formerly or presently unhoused San Franciscans to The California Historical Society at 678 Mission Street in San Francisco. They viewed a collection of paintings, prints, photographs, and mixed media pieces by more than 40 artists in an exhibition entitled "Hobos to Street People: Artists' Responses to Homelessness from the New Deal to the Present."

The show was on display from February 19 to August 15, 2009. It was organized by curator Art Hazelwood, a San Francisco artist whose artworks on homelessness and social justice are often published by *Street Spirit*, and the Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP).

Charming, well-spoken Chandler, 27, once slept in nearby Annie Alley next to a dumpster pictured in an exhibit photo. After one night on the street restlessly avoiding dangerous biting rats, Eric Robinson, 54,

See **Hobos to Street People** *page 10*

The Prophetic Art of Art Hazelwood

Art Hazelwood's riveting artworks expose the cruel mistreatment of poor people in our society, and the destructive greed of big business. His paintings and woodcuts depict the inhumanity of an unjust empire, and unmask the hidden reality of corporate abuse and governmental violence.

"The Beast" Screenprint by Art Hazelwood

"Service Economy" Woodcut by Art Hazelwood

"Market Street" Painting by Art Hazelwood (oil on canvas)

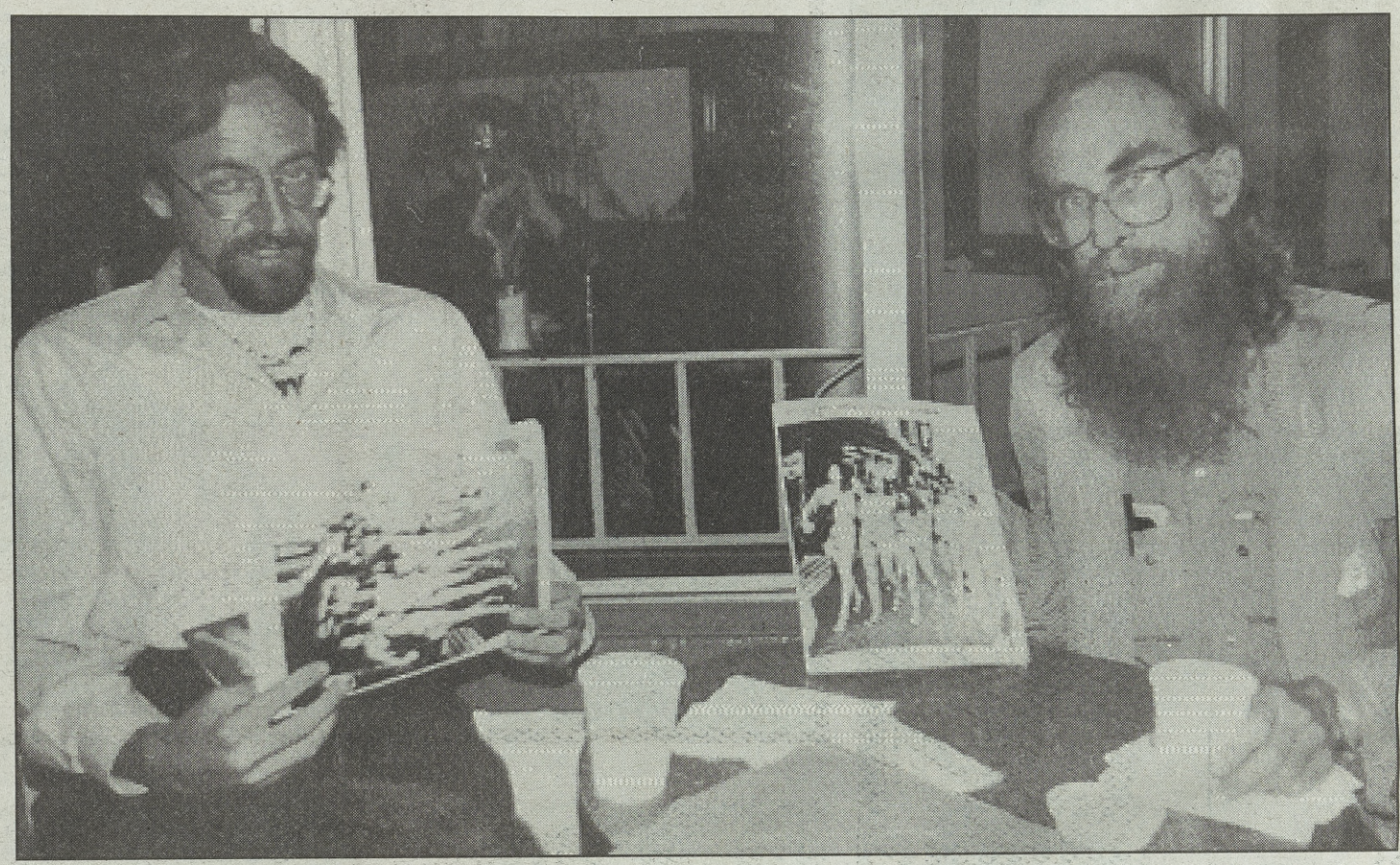
"Trickle Down" Linocut by Art Hazelwood

"America—A Prophecy" Painting by Art Hazelwood (oil on canvas)

The Off-Beat Artistry of an 'Archetypal Weirdo'

The alienated life and weird times of legendary street artist B.N. Duncan

B.N. Duncan looked like your weird uncle that you kept in the basement, out of sight. He was the archetypal weirdo artist and an anthropologist of the gutter.



Berkeley street artists Ace Backwords *(left)* and B.N. Duncan *(right)* were friends and artistic collaborators for three decades.

by Ace Backwords

Telegraph Avenue legend B.N. Duncan died in Berkeley on Saturday, June 27, 2009. He was 65. I first met Duncan at Krishna Copy on the corner of Telegraph and Dwight way back in 1979. He was xeroxing off copies of *Tele Times*, a little homemade magazine he published. And I was xeroxing copies of *Ass Backwards Comix #1*. So we were on the same page, literally, from the word go.

Geez, I must have been 23, so Duncan was 36. He looked like a weird old man with his disheveled hair and thick horn-rimmed glasses and ratty old clothes. He looked like your weird uncle that you kept in the basement, out of sight. He was the archetypal weirdo artist.

At the time, he lived in a dusty little hotel room on the 4th floor of the Berkeley Inn. His room was just beginning to clutter up with his boxes of artwork. He had one or two friends who were just as weird and alienated as him. Aside from that, he had almost no social life.

Duncan spent his whole life on the fringe of society, a life-long SSI recipient. I figured we were both a couple of losers who would spend our lives xeroxing off 20 copies of our latest cartoons and mailing them out to an indifferent world.

"Outsider art," he called his work. In fact, Duncan had a strong identification with Van Gogh, and figured his work would never be fully appreciated in his lifetime. He was an artistic genius, in my opinion.

In the late 1960s, Duncan had gone completely nuts. He was completely alienated and couldn't find any place to fit into society He'd hear voices — six distinct characters who would carry on private conversations in his head. He ended up getting locked up in a mental institution. The head psychiatrists told him he was a hopeless case and would probably have to spend the rest of his life in the nut house. So that shows you how far he came to have the magnificent life he had.

Duncan published the first 20 issues of *Tele Times* — "Telegraph's Tight Little Monthly" — in relative obscurity, with print runs of about 100 copes. In truth, he probably lost money on every single publication he ever put out by himself.

He was one of the first publishers to focus on homeless street people and so-called ordinary people — this was the mid-1970s after all — treating them the same way that most mainstream publishers treated celebrities. As usual, Duncan was ahead of his times.

Then he began corresponding with famed underground cartoonist R. Crumb. They immediately clicked. Crumb recognized a fellow traveler, calling Duncan "the quintessential underground cartoonist." And Crumb should know.

Duncan published an interview with Crumb and his wife Aline in *Tele Times*, and that opened up whole new worlds for Duncan. For Duncan was an "artist's artist." Though his work was vastly underappreciated by the general public, he was revered by many of the greats in the cartooning field; people like Kim Dietch, Dan Clowes, Peter Bagge, and Harvey Pekar.

Maybe with guys like Duncan, who are so weird and unique, it just takes time for the world at large to catch up with them. But other artists usually know.

In 1989, on a whim, I got the crazy idea to publish a photo calendar of Berkeley street people. I wanted to take the raw and quirky work Duncan was producing with *Tele Times* and put a bit of a commercial sheen on it. It was an immediate local hit. And for the next 15 years, from 1990 to 2004, we would annually

See **Archetypal Weirdo Artist** *page 9*

B.N. Duncan's unforgettable image of a panhandler asking the Statue of Liberty for a light suggests that those living on the street must beg even for the light of freedom.

HOMELESS & FEELING BLUE

by B.N. Duncan

A man can be weakened by
blows to his spirit,
Both imposed from without
and self-imposed.
We travel through life
in much darkness,
Now and then receiving
sparks and glows of our
richness within welling up.
A perverse part of the mind
seeks a "solution" to conflict, a
wrapping up of it all, by courting
downfall, courting disaster —
often leaving more of a mess.
The light in us remains
all the more precious
for often being covered up.
A man can forget his pride,
letting himself be like dead ashes,
neglecting his inner glossy essence,
himself being a creation in process.
A man can be weary while he
bears the embers of bright light.
He should not give up
before his time.

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Street Spirit is published by the **American Friends Service Committee (AFSC).** Homeless vendors receive 50 papers a day, earn income and find a job providing a positive alternative to panhandling, and educate the community about social justice issues. Please **donate** or **subscribe** to *Street Spirit* ! Help us remain an independent voice for justice!

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Street Spirit

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Street Spirit welcomes submissions of articles, poems, photos and art, but cannot guarantee they will be published.

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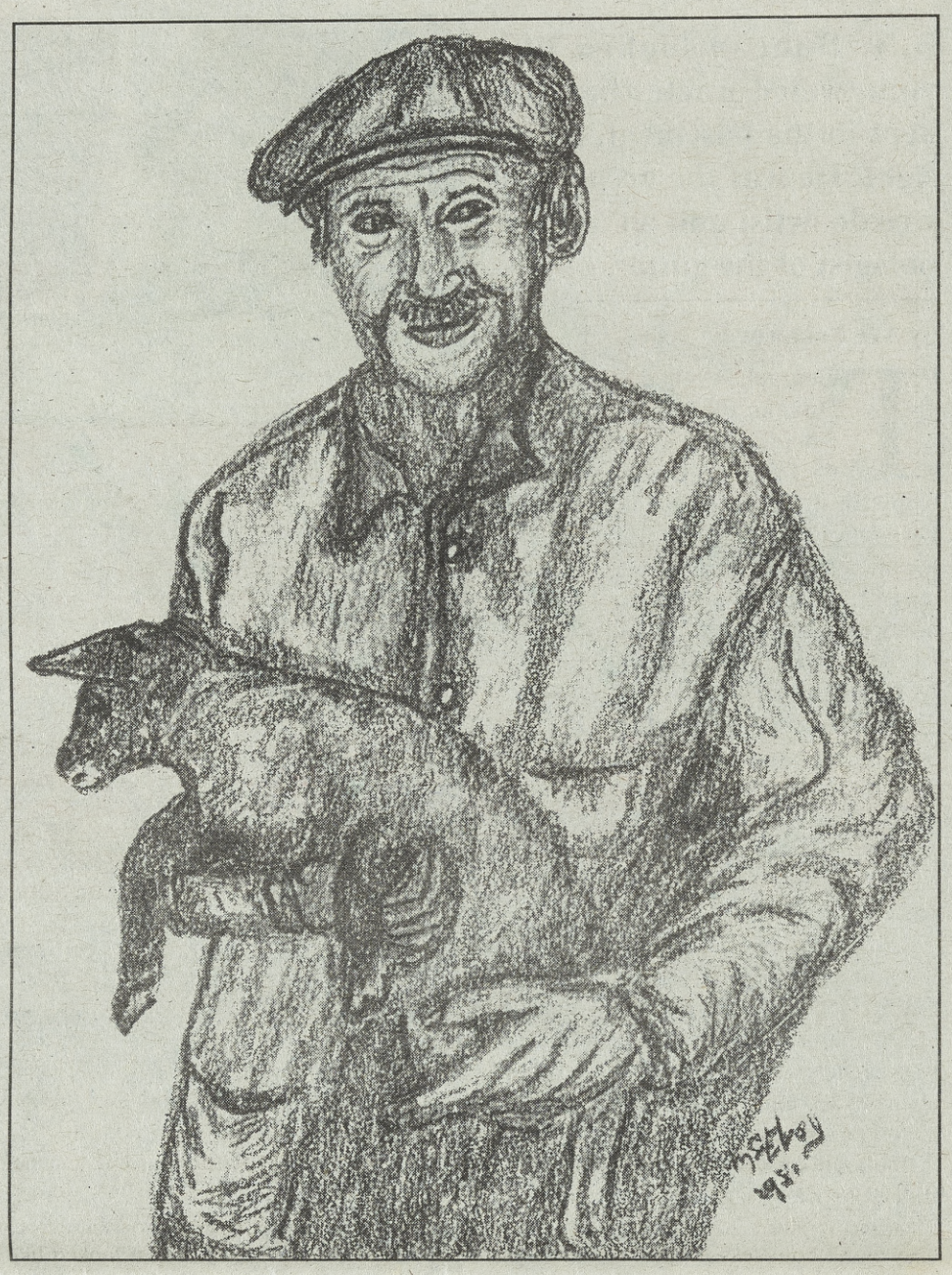
A Gentle Homeless Artist Loved by Many

A remembrance of Charles McElroy's lifetime of kindness and joy

Charles McElroy sells *Street Spirit* and displays his colorful art. Lydia Gans photo



***"Tender Concern."* Self-portrait of the artist with a lost lamb.** Art by Charles McElroy

To all appearances, Charlie was the homeless one, the one in need. In reality, it was the reverse. Those who *met him felt more loved, more at home. They received* something ineffable from him, a Christ-like type of love.

by Joan Clair

"Those who know me are few;
Those that abuse me are honored.
Therefore the sage wears rough clothing
And holds the jewel in his heart."
— Lao Tsu

"But when you give a feast, invite the
poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind,
and you will be blessed,
because they cannot repay you.
You will be repaid at the
resurrection of the just."
— Luke 14:13

In the children's story, "Stone Soup," some hungry soldiers ask villagers in a small French village for food and a place of rest. The villagers refuse, saying they have only enough for themselves. The soldiers tell the villagers they will make soup from stones and ask for a large pot. The intrigued villagers bring a large pot, as well as some large stones and water.

Musing, the soldiers say how much better the soup would taste with a little salt and pepper. Fascinated by the idea of a soup made from stones, the villagers bring salt and pepper, and then one by one, they bring more ingredients, until finally, they have brought all the ingredients needed to make a real soup. The soup is happily shared by all.

Charles McElroy shared in the holy process of making soup from stones, the stones being the hardened part of ourselves, the part that doesn't want to share, give or even receive. He was homeless for more than ten years in Berkeley, and during that period, he was hospitalized frequently for illnesses of the kidneys and liver. He passed away one month ago, on March 25, 2009, at the age of 74.

At the time of his death, Charlie was still homeless, but he was surrounded by a group of friends who cared deeply for him. Sadly enough, on the eve of his death, they succeeded in finding a housing subsidy that would have made his dream of a permanent, stable home a reality.

In his last years, Charlie found and was able to create some community on the corner of Solano Avenue and Colusa in Berkeley outside of Starbucks. He would stand or sit in a little chair on that corner selling *Street Spirit*, sharing his wonderful art, talking with people who became his friends, and giving away stuffed animals to children.

Many people stopped by just to be able to talk with him. If someone was feeling lonely or bad, they would come away feeling better. He was loved and appreciated by a lot of people.

Once, when I was at the street corner with him, I personally witnessed the hardness melt in one of the people who dropped by. The man asked Charlie a lot of questions, almost as if he was questioning his veracity. Charlie answered the questions without any pretensions, and with the sweetness and humbleness that often emanated from him.

The man finally dropped a few coins in Charlie's cup, even though Charlie never verbally solicited. I could feel a wall coming down in the man, who needed to give more than Charlie needed to receive the coins. The interaction reminded me of these words of the Taoist sage Lao Tsu:

"Nothing in the world is as soft and yielding as water. Yet for dissolving the hard and inflexible, nothing can surpass it. The soft overcomes the hard; the gentle overcomes the rigid."

Charlie had a childlike joy in finding things he could give away and share with others. He especially liked to frequent a dollar store on University Avenue where he would pick up stuffed animals for children. In this respect, he was a living example of what Jesus meant in saying that we will enter heaven only if we become like little children.

Lao Tsu in the *Tao Te Ching* also talks about the sage being like a child: "The sage is shy and humble — to the world he seems confusing.... He behaves like a little child." And also, "Being the stream of the universe, ever true and unswerving, become as a little child once more."

In the last few weeks of Charlie McElroy's life, I drove him to the dollar store on University Avenue, as he said he needed a pair of pants. Walking for even a few blocks was difficult for him at this point. As I sat outside the store in my car waiting, his shopping seemed to be taking a very long time. I went inside the store to see what was going on.

Charlie was at the counter with stuffed animals, and pants — not his size — for a friend, and various other items. And he was going back for more.

"He's never in here for just a few minutes," the storekeeper said.

"Like he told me he would be," I thought to myself, as I went back outside to sit in my car, feeling a bit put out. My dog was in the back seat waiting patiently without any sign of disturbance, and suddenly I joined her in spirit. A feeling of peace came over me, and I began to meditate and pray.

The surroundings at this location on University Avenue were dull, consisting mostly of office buildings and businesses with little vegetation and trees. The sun shone on the dullness of the scene. However, the hardness of feeling "put out" left me. And in its place, I felt grateful for the experience, including the humdrum surroundings, and even a bit transformed.

Having shared my life with my dog for 14 years, I know when strangers come up to us assuming that since she's a dog, she has a need to be petted and craves attention; it is their hardness, not her needs, that is being melted down.

Same with Charlie. To all appearances, he was the homeless one, the one in need, the "taker." In reality, it was the reverse. Those who interacted with Charlie felt more loved, more at home, more fulfilled. They received something ineffable from him, a Christ-like type of love.

In astrology, the planet Venus rules love, but it is love of a personal nature. Another planet, Neptune, is often called the higher octave of Venus. Neptune symbolizes the kind of Christ-like love which goes beyond families, nationalities, ethnicities. Neptune is the ruler of Pisces, a water sign in which the "water element" wears down stones and creates oneness and union: "The highest good is like water," Lao Tsu said. "Water gives life to the ten thousand things and does not strive.... It flows in places men reject."

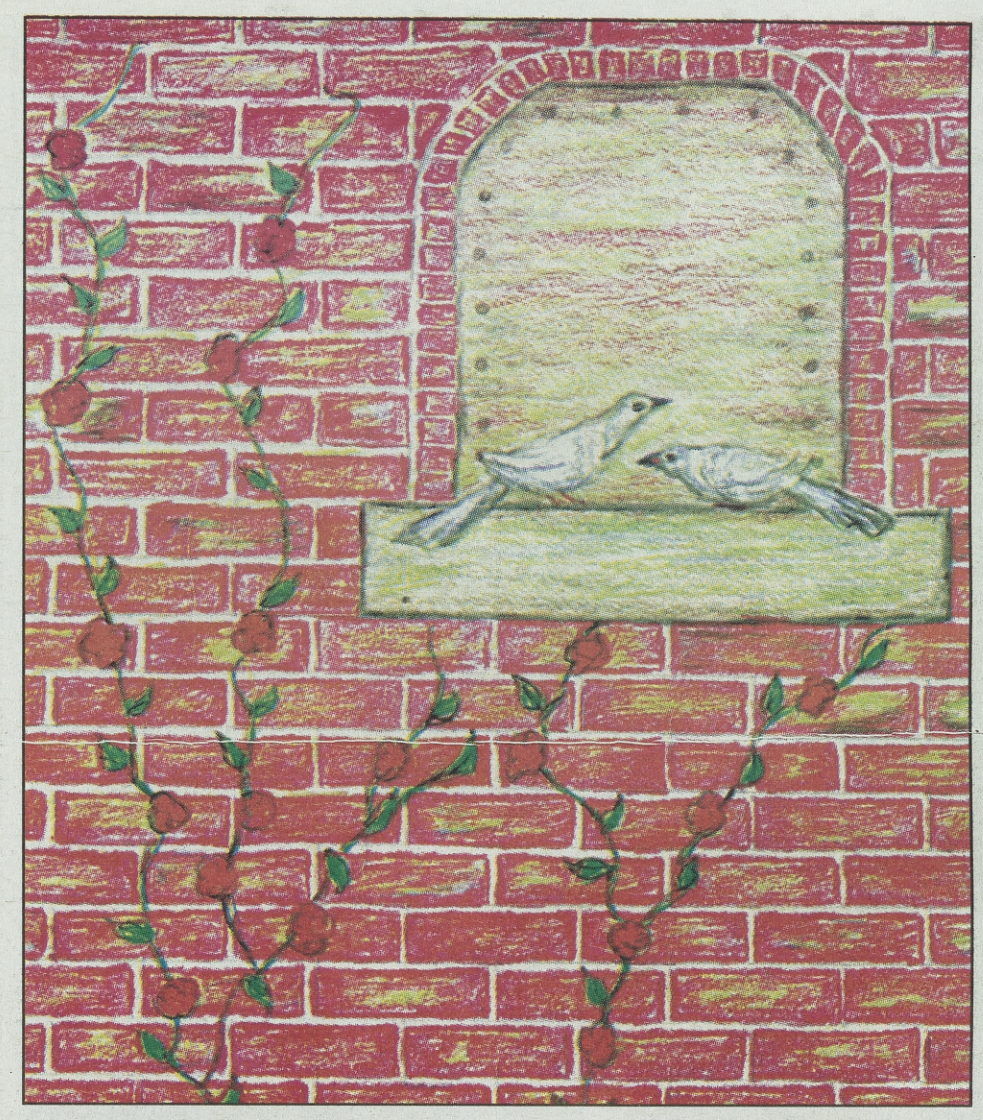
This is the kind of love Charlie shared with others, through his self and through his beautiful art — although he never had an art lesson in his life.

But prior to his finding a place on Solano Avenue in Berkeley where his qualities were appreciated, he, himself, was often rejected.

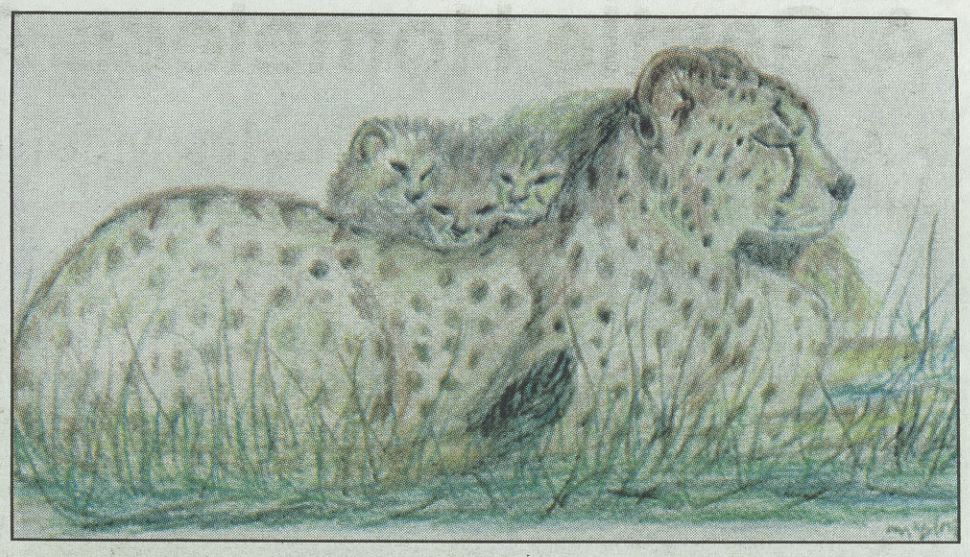
In the years from 1999 to 2003, Charlie experienced constant harassment as he stood outside Wild Oats store (later named Picadilly Circus) in Berkeley. He was given citations by the police. He was prevented from purchasing food and vitamins in the store and using the restroom, simply because he was a homeless man.

The store management admitted to *Street Spirit* reporters that Charlie had

See **A Homeless Artist** *page 5*

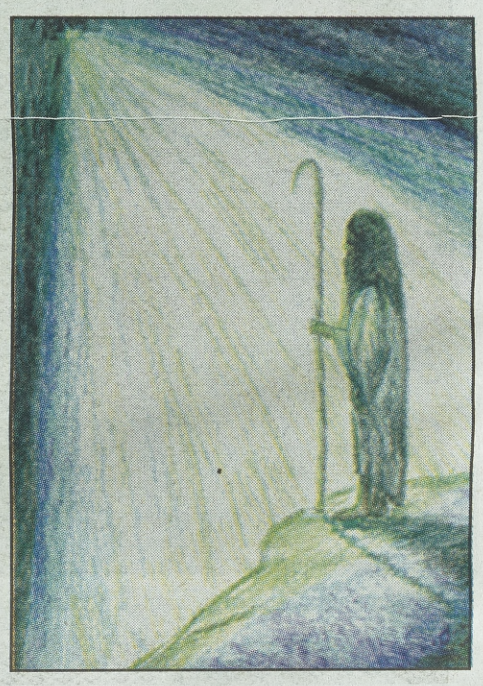


"Two doves." Art by Charles McElroy



A mother provides comfort and security for her three babies. Art by Charles McElroy

"Flowers." Art by Charles McElroy



"Contemplation." Art by Charles McElroy

A Homeless Artist Loved by Many

from page 4

never once caused any trouble and was well liked by many store customers. Yet, since the store was determined to drive away all homeless people, Charlie's gentleness and good will counted for nothing, and he became an innocent victim of a cruelly inhumane store policy.

He was criminalized and cited by Berkeley police officers, simply for being poor near a store. A new restaurant that opened up the street from Wild Oats also denied Charlie admission. [These incidents were reported in "Wild Oats Market Bans Ailing Homeless Artist," in the December 1999 issue of *Street Spirit* by Terry Messman and "Exodus of the Poor from an Oasis" in the February 2000 and July 2003 issues of *Street Spirit* by Joan Clair.]

No one could provide any evidence that Charlie had ever disturbed anyone in the course of his selling *Street Spirit* and his art outside the store. The citations were eventually dropped.

The Reverend Pondurenga Das, a Berkeley yoga teacher, who remembers Charlie from the Wild Oats days, was surprised to find out Charlie was still alive shortly before his passing. He remembered that even in those days, 10 years ago, Charlie was in a lot of pain from illnesses.

"I loved the guy," he said. As was the case with many who got to know the homeless artist on Solano Avenue, many who shopped at Wild Oats felt the same affection for Charlie that Das did.

At the very end of his life, things began to come together for Charlie in a way that he did not live quite long enough to enjoy. Although he had a brief stay in a board-and-care home during the years he was homeless, Charlie was never able to find a "real home" where he could cook for himself. He spent most of those years sleeping in his van, even though he said an apartment is what he wanted.

Why Charlie was never able to find an apartment, or get a voucher for one he could afford, during all his years of homelessness, is still a mystery. One Berkeley case worker for the homeless believes that with such frequent hospitalizations, the hospital should have contacted him or someone in a similar position in social services for the homeless to help Charlie find permanent housing.

At the end of his life, a housing voucher was finally obtained for him through the Shelter Plus Care program. Within a couple of months, possibly less, it looked like Charlie would finally have the kind of home he wanted. There was grief on the part of those who had tried to help him at the suddenness of his passing.

Even an electric wheelchair that worked well had been obtained for him, at no cost. It looked like once he got an apartment, he would be eligible for in-home care and would be able to maintain the independence he treasured.

One more quote from Lao Tsu seems to apply to Charlie here: "Retire when the work is done. This is the way of heaven."

None of us really know when that moment is. However, I truly believe that when Charlie left, his work had largely been completed here on Earth.

Lynn Farley, a friend of Charlie's for many years, saw him as a deeply spiritual person. We both intuitively felt, a few days before he passed on, that the "doors of heaven" were opening up for him and great joy and welcome were awaiting him when he made his transition.

A Carmelite religious sister had this to say on hearing of Charlie's passing: "Life is very, very short. That he lived out his own without bitterness bespeaks a true, living and deep personal relationship with his God, a fact he may not have been aware of — until now. Each individual is so unique, so really unknown to anyone except God who created him or her, because He *wanted* that unique person. Let us unite in thanking God for Charlie, for God's love for him and for the completion of his lifework — that of manifesting in his own beautiful and unrepeatable way our God."

Some unexpected miracles occurred after his death. Charlie had told his niece, Zarinah Francois, that he did not want to be cremated. To honor his wishes, she was preparing to take out an exorbitant loan to purchase a burial plot, when we got the news that a burial plot had been donated by St. Mary's Cemetery in Oakland.

As it turned out, the plot is in a beautiful, peaceful location, near tall trees with a view of the smooth, green grass of a nearby golf course. In addition to this, Charlie McElroy is now buried near the grave of Father Bill O'Donnell, a well-known peace activist and advocate for the poor, and the longtime pastor of St. Joseph the Worker Church.

The El Sobrante Methodist Church, under the guidance of the Reverend Gaye C. Benson, not only allowed a memorial service to be held for Charlie in the church, but donated beautiful flowers, a guestbook, and assumed the cost of creating programs for participants. The church, under the direction of Rev. Benson, has a history of selflessly reaching out into the community and helping others. Charlie had been baptized in the Gospel Hall Methodist Church in St. Louis, Missouri, where he was raised.

Charles McElroy had great powers of regeneration and transformation. From the ashes of his own life in his younger years of drug abuse and incarceration, he rose like a phoenix and found his calling.

It might have seemed like a tragic calling to some, his selling *Street Spirit* and sharing his artwork on the street when he was homeless, often ill and in pain. But to those who knew him, there was a joy that triumphed in his life. He shared that joy with others, and they were uplifted by it.

John Greenleaf Whittier's poem, "The Robin," speaks to the beauty and the love, as well as the suffering endured by Charles McElroy in the life he shared with us. Whittier's poem concludes with a beautiful verse that calls to mind the way Charles McElroy lived his life.

"Prayers of love like rain-drops fall,
Tears of pity are cooling dew,
And dear to the heart of Our Lord are all,
Who suffer like Him in the good they do!"

Charles McElroy offered those "prayers of love" for others, and he often suffered for the good works he did. The central insight of Whittier's poem is that those who offer mercy and compassion are especially dear to the heart of God.

Editor's note: One would never know it from reading Joan Clair's story, but she was a true friend to Charles McElroy for years. She is a dedicated advocate who worked tirelessly to organize support and find housing for Charlie. She visited him in the hospital, helped him and prayed for him in his final days, and then found a burial plot for free. *Street Spirit* dedicates this poem by Whittier to Joan Clair, in thanks for the works of mercy.

"I Was a Stranger, and Ye Took Me In"

by John Greenleaf Whittier

'Neath skies that winter never knew
The air was full of light and balm,
And warm and soft the Gulf wind blew
Through orange bloom and groves of palm.

A stranger from the frozen North,
Who sought the fount of health in vain,
Sank homeless on the alien earth,
And breathed the languid air with pain.

God's angel came! The tender shade
Of pity made her blue eye dim;
Against her woman's breast she laid
The drooping, fainting head of him.

She bore him to a pleasant room,
Flower-sweet and cool with salt sea air,
And watched beside his bed, for whom
His far-off sisters might not care.

She fanned his feverish brow and smoothed
Its lines of pain with tenderest touch.
With holy hymn and prayer she soothed
The trembling soul that feared so much.

Through her the peace that passeth sight
Came to him, as he lapsed away
As one whose troubled dreams of night
Slide slowly into tranquil day.

The sweetness of the Land of Flowers
Upon his lonely grave she laid
The jasmine dropped its golden showers,
The orange lent its bloom and shade.

And something whispered in her thought,
More sweet than mortal voices be
"The service thou for him hast wrought
O daughter! hath been done for me."

At Youth Spirit Artworks Young Artists Learn to Let Their Light Shine

Molly Gaspar paints a beautiful new design on her art chair, "Mexica New Year."

Shanice Kiel's art chair has a message: "Live forever, fear never, always prosper."

Precious Gordon with her "Princess Precious" chair.

Charles Hutson paints a huge golden lion on a table.

Sally Hindman shows an artistic chair created by YSA.

Story and photos by Lydia Gans

One way to fight juvenile crime and gang violence is to provide some positive alternatives. Back in the 1960s, during President Lyndon Johnson's War On Poverty, we had Teen Posts, community centers in low-income areas where kids could hang out, learn skills, be involved in activities and make connections beyond their immediate neighborhood.

With a few notable exceptions, there's not much of that available for poor city kids these days.

One exciting program for homeless and low-income young people, aged 16 to 25, is Youth Spirit Artworks (YSA), based in Berkeley. Operating out of the Youth Spirit Artworks studio at 1769 Alcatraz Avenue, the program provides a place where young people can learn about art and create their own art works.

Sally Hindman, founder and director of Youth Spirit Artworks, described the multifaceted program where low-income youth can use art to bring about social change, earn money and have fun!

YSA is an interfaith youth arts jobs and job-training organization involved in artistic work, community arts activities and jobs programs with homeless and at-risk youth, ages 16 to 25.

One of YSA's initial areas of activity, Hindman said, was "taking old, recycled furniture, chairs that people have thrown out, tables that people have donated, and having youth turning them into art."

The youth involved with YSA have produced scores of artistically creative chairs and tables, and the young artists get 50 percent of everything that is sold. "Let me just say that art furniture is pricey," Hindman added.

The creation of artistically redesigned and beautified furniture by Youth Spirit Artworks was originally modeled after YaYa (Young Aspirations, Young Artists), a New Orleans furniture-painting program for low-income youth that was founded in 1988. That program has changed the lives of thousands of young people, as well as being a hugely successful business enterprise. Recently, six teens were chosen — based on the outstanding work they did with YSA — to travel to New Orleans, accompanied by YSA program staff, to meet with artists and activists involved with YaYa (Young Aspirations, Young Artists).

VISIONS OF THE SOUL

Just last month, Youth Spirit Artworks completed its beautiful "Visions Of The Soul" art exhibit, a series of brightly painted banners displayed in storefront windows in South Berkeley.

The YSA art exhibit has provided an outlet for the creativity of low-income and homeless youth, and now the colorful, imaginative visions of young artists are on public display in a campaign to beautify South Berkeley neighborhoods.

Young artists trained by Youth Spirit Artworks painted 40 canvas art banners which are now hanging in store windows in South Berkeley on Adeline Street between 63rd Street and Woolsey Street, and Alcatraz Avenue between Dover Street and Ellis Street. The exhibit starts one block south of Ashby BART and covers six blocks of vacant and under-beautified buildings.

Hindman said, "We gets kids from everywhere — foster care kids, street kids, kids in transitional housing — all below poverty level."

Youth Spirit Artworks provides an opportunity for the youth to be creative and to explore new ideas, and at the same time, it is a serious learning experience.

YSA carries out its work through two program training areas: Community Art, engaging youth as leaders in neighborhood revitalization through painting murals, carrying out tile projects, and other public art works; and Studio Art, involving youth in creating commercial art to sell.

Youth play an important role in the leadership of the organization, and set its direction through a weekly YSA Youth Council. Youth Spirit is a green organization, deeply committed to creating art from recycled and reused materials. The mission of YSA is to empower and transform the lives of young people by giving them the experience, skills and self-confidence to meet their full potential.

A MURAL FOR MUSICIANS

Recently, in South Berkeley, the young artists involved with Youth Spirit Artworks painted a marvelous mural of musicians, in order to artistically transform a symbol of urban blight.

The Loren neighborhood around Alcatraz Avenue and Adeline Street in South Berkeley has long been known as an arts district. Home to musicians and

See **Youth Spirit Artworks** *page 7*

Youth Spirit Artworks

"The wall was begging to have something on it. I'm just tickled pink. I think they did an exceptional job."

— Michael Cogan, Bay Records

from page 6

writers and artists, it now boasts a new attraction. A magnificent mural, two stories high and almost 70 feet long, was created recently by a group of young Berkeley students from low-income families, working with Youth Spiair Artworks.

Many of the Berkeley High School and City College students have had little exposure to art. They worked together to create the design, as well as doing the actual painting of the mural, located on Ellis Street just off Alcatraz.

Hindman described why they chose to create a mural. "We decided that we wanted to respond to the need in our neighborhood," she said. The neighborhood has many vacant buildings with blank walls that are constant targets for graffiti.

"This wall was recommended to us by one of the neighbors who said the wall was driving them crazy," Hindman said. "It was constantly being tagged and repainted. (It had) became a real eyesore."

Youth Spirit Art Works creatively transformed this symbol of urban blight into a colorful splash of artistic vision that helps to beautify the neighborhood.

The building belongs to Michael Cogan, owner of Bay Records, a recording studio that has been there for 50 years. He is delighted with the mural. "The wall was begging to have something on it," Cogan said. "I'm just tickled pink. I think they did an exceptional job."

It is particularly appropriate since Cogan's Bay Records is mostly engaged in recording music, and music is the theme of the mural. Hindman suggested that creating the mural in that area also addresses issues of gentrification and celebrates the history of the neighborhood.

Edythe (Edie) Boone, a well-known muralist, artist and teacher, was the lead artist and director of the project. In an interview, she said that the process involved "getting the kids to believe that we could paint that big wall, which was 69 feet long and two stories high."

Such a massive project might seem overwhelming to young students who had never before designed a giant mural, but to compound the difficulty, Boone was working with many students who had little or no artistic experience at all.

Boone said, "A lot of the students didn't have art (experience), didn't know how to draw or paint. So in the beginning, it was having them draw, draw, draw for about three weeks, just making them believe that we could do this and it was going to be a beautiful mural."

The artists had decided that the theme of the mural would be music, so they chose the musicians whose images they wanted to paint on the mural, and then began working out other design features.

The musicians pictured reflect a wide diversity of musical styles and cultures. Among them are Billie Holliday, Selena, Tupac, Jimi Hendrix, the Grateful Dead, Michael Jackson, and popular local musician Johnny Talbot.

Another prominent figure in the mural is Miss Richie Smith, who has been active in the community for 50 years. A retired school teacher, she serves on various neighborhood and city groups and commissions.

The new mural in South Berkeley portrays community activist Richie Smith holding a drum, representing the community's heartbeat. *From left,* are Sareena Johnson, a YSA team leader, and Jessica and Jamie Perkins. Lydia Gans photo

"I love my community and look out for it and try to keep things going smoothly," Smith said. "As seniors, we need to be more involved with our young people. They get so many bad credits for being teenagers."

Asked how she feels about being portrayed on the mural, she said, "It's heartwarming, it leaves me speechless. Usually this happens to people once they've passed on, and it's happened to me while I'm alive and can realize it."

She talked about the pleasure she got watching the mural take shape, and she expressed great admiration for the way Edie Boone guided the project.

In the mural, Miss Richie is pictured holding a drum. "It's really symbolic," Hindman suggested. "I think it has to do with the universal symbolism of the drum as the human heartbeat, the never-ending heartbeat of humanity.... The neighborhood is going through a lot of changes, but the drum is still beating."

More than just a mural project, this was a job-training program for the participants. Boone explained, "The program was a training program, training young people how to be on a job, come on time, how to act on a job. There was a lot of training going on because a lot of the students just didn't know — so we had to really be strict with them and tell them if you were on another job this could not happen (if they're late). You have to come on time. This was a regular job and we want them to feel like they were actually working and they had a job to do. They weren't here to socialize."

This article was compiled from four stories that first appeared in the February 2008, March 2008, November 2009, and June 2010 issues of *Street Spirit*.

Artists Bizz Boyd and Jasmain Johnson measure Ciera Richards' banner.

Apprentice Program Leader Sahara Simon holds up her "Goddess #1" banner.

Youth Spirit Artworks

Visit Youth Spirit's website at: www.youthspiritartworks.org or become a fan of our Facebook Page: Youth Spirit Artworks.

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Spirit-Filled Book of Poetry Arises from the Streets

by Lydia Gans

A special feature of *Street Spirit* that our readers highly value and that makes the paper unique is an abundance of poetry — poetry written by people who are homeless or housed, who have compassion for their fellow humans struggling to survive, and the gift of being able to find artistic and heartfelt words to express it. It is what gives spirit to the *Street Spirit*.

Claire J. Baker and Mary Rudge, two poets who have often been published in the paper, have produced a book titled *Poems from Street Spirit*. Their book of poetry is dedicated to the paper, to its editor Terry Messman, and to all the people who help make it happen each month.

Both of these women have received numerous honors and published many collections of their poetry. This little book contains poems that speak of poverty and homelessness, of peace and love and social justice. Its subtitle, "Justice News and Homeless Blues," echoes the subheading of the *Street Spirit* newspaper.

Suffering from abuse and neglect as a child, Claire Baker began writing poetry when she was in her teens. "I sort of latched onto poetry," she recalls. "I didn't know what I was doing but I kept writing." She found that her poetry elicited some of the attention she craved. "My mother said, 'That's nice, honey,' and I thought, ''Wow, that's different!'"

Claire was soon left on her own and at one point found herself homeless. A creative writing class in night school provided a positive experience she remembers with pleasure. The teacher was very encouraging and her fellow students, mostly older people, "saw me like a little orphan, and would ask me out to dinners."

Claire has worked at all sorts of jobs but she identifies herself as a poet. "I've made my life work as being a poet," she says. She always loved the outdoors, hiking and mountain climbing, and much of her poetry has been about nature. She describes her poems as "philosophical and kind of lyrical." They are carefully crafted and reflect deep thought.

Claire's own experience of homelessness motivates her to write the kind of poetry she submits to *Street Spirit*. "These poems are easy for me to write," she explains. When she thinks about people on the street, she says, "It's easy for me to empathize. I put myself in their position (and) it helps me to write." All the poems in this little book are short, none is over a page in length, and most leave the reader with a pang of sadness or compassion or an angry desire for justice.

In Claire's poem, "Books," she writes:

While too many dastardly CEOs
fudge books to show amazing profits
live the "high life" on twisted backs
of duped employees and investors,

the homeless try to reassemble
the torn-out pages of their lives,
straighten sore backs to regain
some balance toward the rich reward
known as a roof over one's head.

Now retired, Claire volunteers in community work. About 12 years ago, she became a member of the Unitarian Universalist church, the only church she was ever interested in, she declares. As a result of that involvement, she became interested in social justice and peace issues, interests she shares with Mary Rudge.

Claire and Mary have known each other for over 30 years, having first met through the Alameda poets' group. Their common concerns and, at the same time, their differences in style, motivated them to collaborate on this book.

Mary Rudge also experienced poverty and abuse as a child. She describes how her father would be so stressed out struggling to make a living that he would beat her if she made noise. Nor was there any intellectual stimulation in her childhood.

Poets Mary Rudge (left) and Claire Baker strike a militant pose while displaying their new book of poetry entitled *Poems from Street Spirit*. Lydia Gans photo

"We had a dictionary and a Bible," she recalls. "I was a voracious reader. I felt I knew all the words. I felt they were my friends. I began writing poetry as if it was a life force within me."

Unlike Claire, who grew up in the Bay Area, Mary spent the first years of her life in Texas in an environment of violence and bigotry and fear. It was not just racism, she explains, "basically it was control issues." Anyone who challenged the power structure suffered. "I knew teenage boys that were taken out in the woods and beaten — just to straighten them out."

It was only when her family moved to Oklahoma when she was a teenager that Mary encountered people of different cultures, primarily the various Indian tribes. It was her first exposure to new ideas, traditions, music and art, and she reveled in the experience. Although her parents didn't see much value in poetry, she "wrote compulsively," she says. "Writing poetry is part of my nature. I'm born to write."

Soon after the family moved back to Texas she got married "just to get away." Her first husband died in an accident. Her second husband was in the Navy and would be at sea for long periods of time. Finally he didn't return at all. She was pregnant at the time with her seventh child, living in the projects in Alameda. When the projects were torn down, she and the children were left homeless.

Mary got help, she recalls, from people who owned a dilapidated old Victorian house that should have been torn down but was rescued by the local preservation society. That was about 35 years ago and she's still in that house, never very far from the edge of homelessness and poverty.

In contrast to Claire's poems, Mary's are longer and have more of a melodic quality to them. They often seem to be reflections on her own experiences. The following two stanzas are part of a longer poem by Mary Rudge entitled, "A Child's View of Winter."

(1) The sun in through my window
when I wake up
makes me feel warm
and loved. I like to
wake up and see the sky.
But the old, old window broke, we could
not afford glass or someone to fix it.
We have found board and cardboard,
and sealed the window hole
because it is winter and we will be cold.
When I wake in the morning and see
darkness, still I know
to feel warm in my heart, to feel loved
because my mother and brother
found cardboard and board.
If we find enough cans extra to pay,
we can have a glass window again.

(2) In winter we only heat one room.
We hang blankets over the doors
and put all our bedding on the floor
and sleep there,
together in one warm room.
I like to hear our breath
in the dark, one family
helping each other keep warm.

Recently, Mary Rudge was named the poet laureate of Alameda. She has won awards and honorary doctorate degrees in the United States and abroad. Her main focus now is writing and research on teaching knowledge and skills to bring about a more peaceful world. Mary told me about working with children, finding out what the word "peace" means to them.

It often has negative connotations, she pointed out. "It was frightening to children (knowing that those) who stood for peace got killed, like King and Gandhi and Christ. And when they heard from their parents, 'Go away and leave me alone so I can have some peace,' and people are at peace now because they are dead, and then the government names its weapons peacekeepers..." Mary went on to talk about how a truly peaceful world has to be based on social and economic justice, respect for people and building healthy communities.

In recognition of her work, she is often invited to participate in events here and in other countries. In describing an invitation to Germany right after the Berlin Wall came down, Mary mused, "It's quite remarkable to think that a person with no assets and no money, just because people respond to what you're saying and it gets out to the world, they start inviting you to places and sometimes paying you to come."

The little book of *Street Spirit* poems by Claire Baker and Mary Rudge is a rewarding read; it touches the mind and the heart. It can be ordered by contacting either author: maryrudgepoet@yahoo.com or clairejjbaker@yahoo.com.

This article first appeared in the March 2006 issue of *Street Spirit*.

One Nation Under God

by Mary Rudge

With broken eyeglasses and broken veins
she stands on the corner showing things
have a kaleidoscopic other view.

When she asks spare change
but you pass by
her only response is "God bless you"
and a broken-toothed smile.
She shows you how hearts really break,
can you feel your own?
She lets you see a whole country with
a government full of broken promises.

IN THE DARK

by Claire J. Baker

I wish you
small invisible wings
to uplift you just in time.

I wish you the stars'
healing story
when you are broken,
fallen from glory.

I wish you the moon's
luminous cloak
that you may shine
in the dark, like God.

A Classic For All Ages

by Mary Rudge

Seven-year-old Diana and I
cry over Gogol's *The Overcoat*
on channel 9 now
cold Russia old poor man
even without subtitles
his face we both know.
It was cold in our house last winter
we had coats from the thrift shop
at night we slept in one bed
we piled on all the coats.
The cold old man is going to die
we saw that face once in our mirror,
and cry.

Found Among the Homeless

by Claire J. Baker

There are many
so magnanimous
they can give any part
of themselves away
and still remain
angels
flowers
star stuff
grain.

The Archetypal Weirdo Artist

An incredible rainbow arched all the way across the far end of People's Park. I figured this was Duncan's way of saying goodbye to the Telegraph scene he so loved before he headed off to the cosmos.

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publish the *Telegraph Avenue Street Calendar*. We got written up in all the local newspapers and the Dan Rather CBS News did a national feature on it. So Duncan began getting some long-overdue recognition.

"When I was the manager of Comic Relief in Berkeley, I used to see Duncan a lot," said Kristine. "Frankly, initially he gave me the creeps. A half-dozen conversations later and I was looking forward to his next visit. He was the first person to show me Dick Briefer Frankenstein and that alone puts him in the pantheon.

"Later, when he asked to borrow some money, I thought, 'Well, there's $10 I'll never see again,' and mainly was concerned that he wouldn't come by the store any more. He repaid me within a week. I regularly lent him money and always got it back, usually with a nice note on a xeroxed page of awesome cartoon art. What a sweetheart. He taught me not to judge people by their crusty tan corduroy jackets, and I'm grateful." (Watch out for most of those guys in crusty corduroy jackets. Duncan was the one-in-a-thousand exception to the rule.)

In a way, I thought that was the secret of why Duncan struck a chord with so many people. Duncan was so *obviously* weird. The rest of us are probably just as weird, we just try and hide it. And by the end of his life, Duncan's social circle included people from all walks of society, from successful lawyers and famed artists to bums on the street, and everyone in between.

Our working relationship was akin to Laurel & Hardy. Duncan was the skinny guy and he'd always screw up ("Gee, Ollie..."). I was the fat guy and I'd always rage and bluster at Duncan ("This is another fine mess you got us into, Stanley!") and screw things up even worse. But we always forgave each other afterwards.

I used to say about our friendship: "Duncan, you're one of the few people strong enough to withstand me." After every joint success, no matter how great or small — whether it was producing yet another artistic masterpiece or merely scrounging up enough dough to buy the next pack of cigarettes — we'd always high-five and say: "Yet another successful Backwords and Duncan collaboration!"

His last few years were spent in failing health. Forty years of smoking and drinking had finally caught up to him (Basic 100s and Old English malt liquor, natch). In his last week they had him in the cancer ward at Alta Bates hospital. So I knew it was trouble.

I visited him for the last time a few weeks ago. As soon as I saw him, I knew it was just about over. I sat there in his hospital room and cried and cried. For 30 years, Duncan had always been out there on Telegraph Avenue whenever I was there. But now it hit me for the first time that he would never be out there again.

I went from giving him pep-talks about "Hang in there! Hang in there!" to "Let it go! Let it go!" You know? "God loves you, and you're going to heaven." And all that crap. But while I sobbed and wept, Duncan laid there on his hospital bed and he was stoic the whole time. He always admired tough guys. I always thought he was doing Humphrey Bogart and James Cagney in his head. ("I never met a dame who didn't understand a good slap in the face!")

In a way, that was the secret of our artistic chemistry. I supplied the emotional and Duncan supplied the intellectual, though in truth, we both had plenty of both sides. Duncan was no cold-blooded intellectual; he had plenty of heart. And I could talk a line of intellectual b.s. with the best of them, in between my emotional tantrums. But we were both strong where the other was weak.

Duncan was like an anthropologist of the gutter. He studied the Berkeley street people, and all of life, like a scientist would study an exotic tribe in New Guinea. He would place his latest artistic specimen under his microscope and study it, as if looking for clues. He'd hold the slide up to the light and say to himself: "Hmmm. Now what does *this* tell me about this cock-eyed human life of ours?"

Everything Duncan did was weird and unique. For years he carried his stuff around with him everywhere he went in this big, bulky cardboard box. For years I tried to get him to switch over to the more practical backpack. To which he said: "I don't want to learn how to use a backpack." I said: "Duncan, backpacks don't come with instructionals."

But that was Duncan. Finally in his last years, he got too weak to carry his box, so he did switch over to a backpack. Which he carried around with him everywhere, cradled in his arms, just like he used to carry his box. "Duncan logic," I called it.

He was such a unique and oddball character, everybody on the scene imitated Duncan and repeated his many catchphrases: "Feel free to look at anything you like!"... "Uh, you couldn't loan me a few bucks until the first?"... "What she needs is a damn good spanking!" And my favorite: "Life is basically good."

For Duncan was a guy who had every good reason to turn into a bitter cynic and yet, in spite of it all, in spite of all the hardships, sufferings and disappointments he endured, he still believed that life was, if not great, at least a darn good thing in its essence.

Duncan was one of the most relentlessly creative people I've ever met. For the 30 years that I knew him, he was constantly working on a new artistic project. And unlike so many artists, when he got an idea, he almost always saw it through from beginning to completion.

Even on his death-bed, when he could barely speak, gasping and hacking for air, Duncan talked excitedly about three different publications that would be publishing his work: "I'm gonna get a review in the next issue of *Mineshaft*. Claire Burch is putting out a book of my writing from *Street Spirit*. And Terri Compost is going to publish some of my photos and drawings in a book about People's Park!"

And his last words to me before he drifted off into a fog of morphine were: "Every day is a triumph!"

UNEARTHING DUNCAN'S ARCHIVES

B.N. Duncan's sister Elaine and I were stuck with the monumental task of wading through his storage locker of possessions. Hundreds and hundreds of boxes haphazardly stacked to the ceiling in this 8-foot-by-8-foot locker. Duncan was so nuts, he saved *everything*. Bank statements and rent receipts from 1978, and old coffee cups, crammed in amongst priceless original artwork and original R. Crumb letters.

The plan was to whittle the stuff down to about 50 boxes of treasures. Duncan's life's work. Then the Ohio State University Cartoon Museum was paying to have it all shipped back to Ohio. After a lifetime of being vaguely bitter about being ignored by the academic world, Duncan was finally finding a place in a prestigious university.

B.N. Duncan created hundreds of drawings of the natural world. Art by B.N. Duncan

It was a mind-boggling trip to wade through the Duncan archives. This mountain of creativity. Forty years of cartoons and writing and photos and sculptures and correspondences and publications (as well as thousands of spanking mags, but that's another story). Some of his work struck me as mundane and pedantic. But the best of it (in my opinion) was touched by pure genius. Pure originality. And face it, a lot of real life is mundane and pedantic. And Duncan rarely went for the sensational. He always went for the real. Which is why his work had legs and will live on.

I couldn't resist going through all of his photos one last time. There were 10 big boxes of them, and I spent 12 hours, non-stop, going through every one. One last trip down memory lane. It was like watching a movie of my life in fast-speed, as 30 years of my life rushed by my eyes. Watching myself go from a young man to an old man. I realized Duncan had not only documented his own life, but he had documented my life as well.

And he had documented the life of the whole Telegraph Avenue scene over the last 30 years. Such was the breadth of his artistic vision. I couldn't help thinking: "Thirty years. How did it go by so fast? In a blink of an eye." And, of course, in the very last batch of photos, there was a shot of Duncan waving goodbye.

Now, I've always believed that when a person dies, their soul lingers very strongly for two weeks in the area where they lived. And for two weeks, the soul has the power to manipulate the action a bit, to bless their friends and tweak their enemies, before the soul finally disperses into the universal. Its a concept that's often mentioned in Hindu scripture.

Anyways, it was Saturday, exactly two weeks after Duncan had died, and Elaine and I had been hacking away at his mountain of possessions for three days non-stop and hadn't even reached the far wall of the storage locker. We were standing outside in the courtyard of the storage place when *Duncan's sister — who's kind of psychic* — said: "We'd better pack up for the day because I think its going to rain."

I remember thinking: "That's ridiculous! It's not going to rain in July!" And yet, a couple hours later, I was walking up Dwight Way towards People's Park and it did in fact start raining. And I looked up in the sky and there was an incredible rainbow that arched all the way across the far end of People's Park.

So I figured this was Duncan's way of saying goodbye to the Telegraph scene he so loved before he headed off to the cosmos. As I stood there in People's Park staring up at the rainbow, I looked behind me, and on the bulletin board at exactly the middle of the rainbow was a copy of the *Oakland Tribune* article about Duncan's memorial, with a big photo of Duncan seemingly staring up at the rainbow.

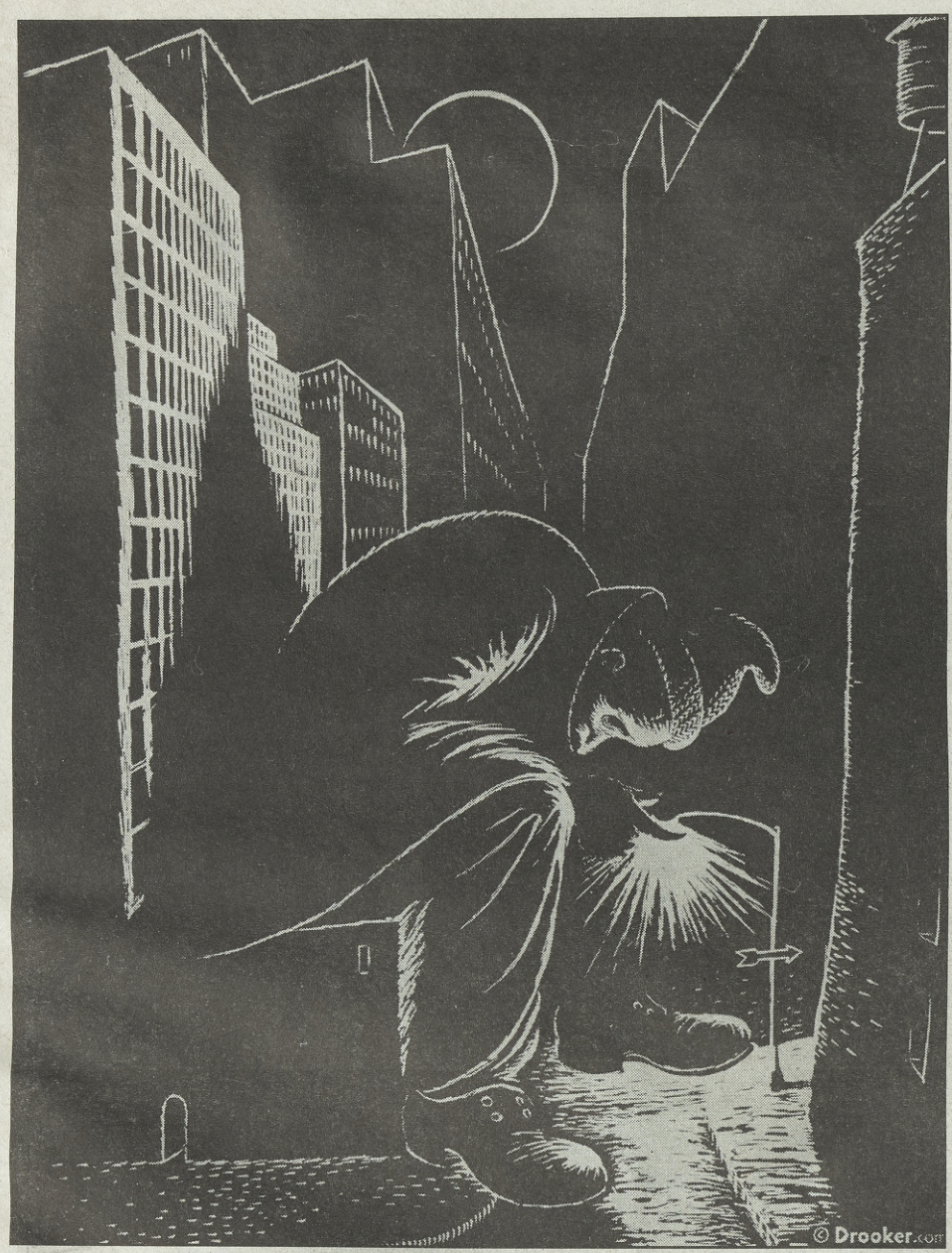
If you wrote up something like that in a novel, nobody would believe it. But real life is weirder than any novel, ain't it?

I went back to Telegraph where Moe's Books was celebrating its 50th anniversary, and there was a band playing inside and free coffee and cake. There was a festive, party atmosphere everywhere on the Ave.

Then I staggered up to my homeless campsite in the Berkeley hills, and there was a band playing at the Greek Theatre. This celestial music wafted out into the night air, some pop song I recognized from the radio about dissolving into the atmosphere.

This cute young chick rushed up to me and asked if I knew where the parking lot was, she was looking for her car. I was no help, but I asked her who the band was. "Death Cab for Cuties," she said. And it was perfect. For that cute old guy B.N. Duncan was saying goodbye before he took his death cab to the heavens.

This article first appeared in the August 2009 issue of *Street Spirit*.



"Homeless Giant" Art by Eric Drooker

"And Now Where?" Lithograph by Rockwell Kent

Hobos to Street People

from page 1

stays in shelters or with friends. David Suttles, 56, camped in the street with his wife after being evicted by a corrupt hotel management. Travis, 28, read John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* just before he was forced to leave home.

Curator Art Hazelwood reported many positive reactions to the show, and favorable media coverage. The occasional negative responses reflect a "demonization" of homeless people by the press and social stereotyping, Hazelwood said.

"People want to turn homeless people into a kind of Other that they can dismiss," he said. "It's easier to dismiss people if you categorize them and accuse them of being morally lax."

Chandler agreed. Her brown bangs swung adamantly. "The newspaper tells people things that aren't true, and people believe it."

This false stereotype "is not something new," Hazelwood said. "One answer to almost any complaint is to point to identical patterns of condemnation throughout our history." The cheap fix of Mayor Gavin Newsom's Care Not Cash program that slashed lifeline benefits to homeless people and Rudy Giuliani's attempt to sweep away New York's homeless like broken glass are paralleled by 19th century social workers who concluded poor people were lazy, defective degenerates who needed rehabilitation by learning the value of work, and sent them to forced labor workhouses "breaking rocks."

Doug Minkler, an artist who sells his art on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley, has a close connection with street life. Eric Robinson was drawn by its color and dynamism to Minkler's painting, "Who Drives The Cycle of Poverty." When Bill Clinton dismantled welfare in 1996, calling it "reform," he did "a lot more damage than any Republican," Minkler said. "The National Lawyer's Guild, seeing this as a real attack on women, and the poor, hired me to do a piece on the concept."

Hazelwood chose Minkler's painting for the show because it satirizes the perpetual poverty "Cycle," the studded tires of a motorcycle gunned toward us by a vicious boar. For its very existence, our capitalist republic seems to require, at varying levels of intensity, poverty's perpetual presence, cycling endlessly round.

Out of the motorcycle pours poisonous exhaust — welfare cuts, layoffs, unemployment, homelessness. "Who drives this cycle?" Minkler asks. "Welfare Queens? Illegal Aliens? Bleeding heart liberals?" Then he gives the answer: "Capitalist Pigs." "Crash the Cycle of Poverty!" or it will drive on and on, carrying the hog to hell.

Hazelwood himself is a San Francisco artist whose etching-style linocuts have enlivened the pages of San Francisco's *Street Sheet* and the East Bay's *Street Spirit* newspapers since 1994.

A year and a half before the economy plunged and the banking crisis caused home foreclosures, mass evictions, and a surge in homelessness, Hazelwood planned a commemoration of the New Deal's 75th anniversary.

During talks with WRAP Director Paul Boden and Berkeley professor Dr. Gray Brechin, an expert on the New Deal, about parallels between the Depression era and today, it struck Hazelwood that a show comparing homelessness in the 1930s with contemporary homelessness was a brilliant way to make it all clear to people. "We've been through this before," Hazelwood said. "We can get through it again. If we try, we can do something to (solve) this problem."

The show's sections focus on four aspects of homelessness:

1. The *daily realities* of life on the road or on the street, without housing.

2. The *displacement, rootlessness and vulnerability* that are part of the homeless condition, and also, the deeper underlying sense of disconnectedness endemic to American culture, housed or homeless.

3. A look at *urban vs. rural poverty*, realizing that homelessness in the country is often unseen and unrecognized.

4. *Struggle and hope* "that we can change things."

DAILY REALITIES

The show contrasts today's homelessness with the Depression era and challenges our narrow range of homeless stereotypes. Homeless people are many and varied. People may live in cars, or in the country. Many hold down jobs, or work hard at recycling. They may live in dangerous shelters — or refuse to live in them, in preference for the street.

In Christine Hanlon's contemporary oil painting, "Third Street Corridor," and Isaac Friedlander's "Gold digger," from 1932, people struggle just to survive, working hard for little reward. In Hanlon's "Corridor," the shopping cart is, on the one hand, an overflowing garbage collection device and, conversely, the Horn of Plenty, the ironic symbol of rampant consumerism. Then, in "Gold digger," trash becomes pure gold to a ragged scavenger.

Most people don't consider tented people working in fields as homeless. Dorothea Lange photographed a young mother with her two babies, one holding a nippled Coke bottle, seated in a Ford near Tulelake, California, in 1939. Near her photo in the exhibit hangs East Bay photographer David Bacon's image of a Mexican mother and child camped out on a hillside in Del Mar, California, in the present.

"They are still the same," said Chandler of the two photos. "The only difference is nowadays they would take your kids from you." Chandler was brought up housed in Seattle. She knew nothing of homelessness until she lost her home and state agencies gave her three children to relatives. She found personal strength in street survival.

The homeless woman seated among the feet of busy downtown pedestrians in Christine Hanlon's painting, "Faux Street Revisited," depressed her. Being "invisible" to passers-by on the street is hard. Chandler humanizes herself by drawing people into conversation.

"I get smart with them sometimes," she said with a smile. "I say, 'Close your eyes. I'm not here. If I'm so invisible asking for help, I guess I'm that invisible when I tell you what I think of you.'"

Understanding this human need for respect and dignity, Hanlon stated that she constructed the space so vanishing points lead to the homeless woman's heart. The viewer looks up — not down — at her.

DISPLACED, ROOTLESS, VULNERABLE

Poor, precariously housed, or unhoused San Franciscans like my invitees Terry Chandler, Eric Robinson, David Suttles, and Travis, lose homes for various reasons — renter or homeowner evictions, loss of paychecks and work, or serious illness. Robinson couch-surfs with a friend while saving up rent. Chandler sleeps in daylight, and walks during the nights for safety. Suttles sells *Street Sheet* for rent for his wife and himself. Travis was displaced from a hotel during a hospitalization but is temporarily housed again.

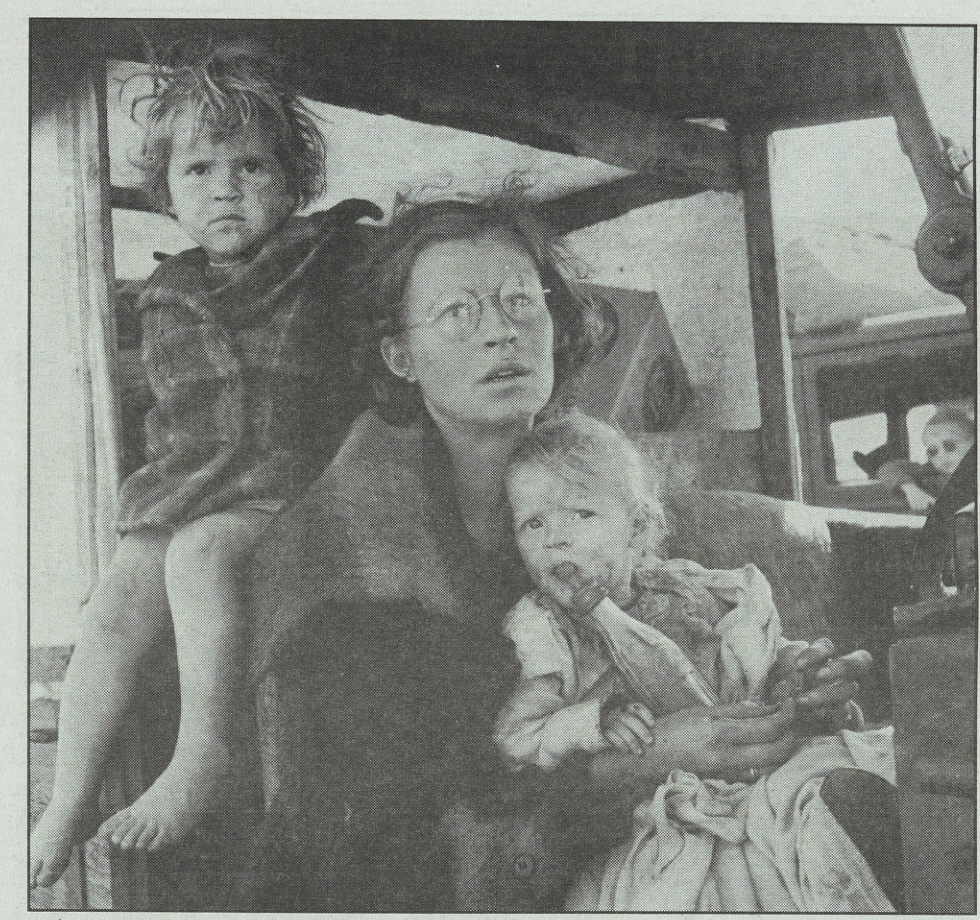
Hazelwood believes the vulnerability of displacement and rootlessness is a U.S. social norm. Our emphasis on money and "moving up" tears us from our safety nets.

Giacomo Patri's illustrated novel, "White Collar" (1938), tells of a middle-class working stiff on the "advancement" treadmill until the stock market crashes. With repeated firings, Patri's character converts, as Hazelwood tells it, from "sneering disinterest in revolutionary speakers and blue-collar organizers he passes on the street," to being blacklisted for unionizing white-collar workers. He and his wife become homeless.

Catholicism and the backlash against war and capitalism in the 1960s and 1970s sensitized Jos Sances to the twin cruelties of privilege and poverty. Sances' symbolism thrusts the viewer into the reality and heart of homelessness. A Boston-born, Irish-Sicilian, altar boy, Sances changed from his "devout" Catholicism to become an atheist, but preserved in his art the fragile beauty of Jesus' humanity.

Robinson warmed to Sances' ceramic image of Jesus' "Sacred Heart" surrounding, then evicting, a mother, father, and two babies from its loving embrace. Robinson, his parents and twin siblings

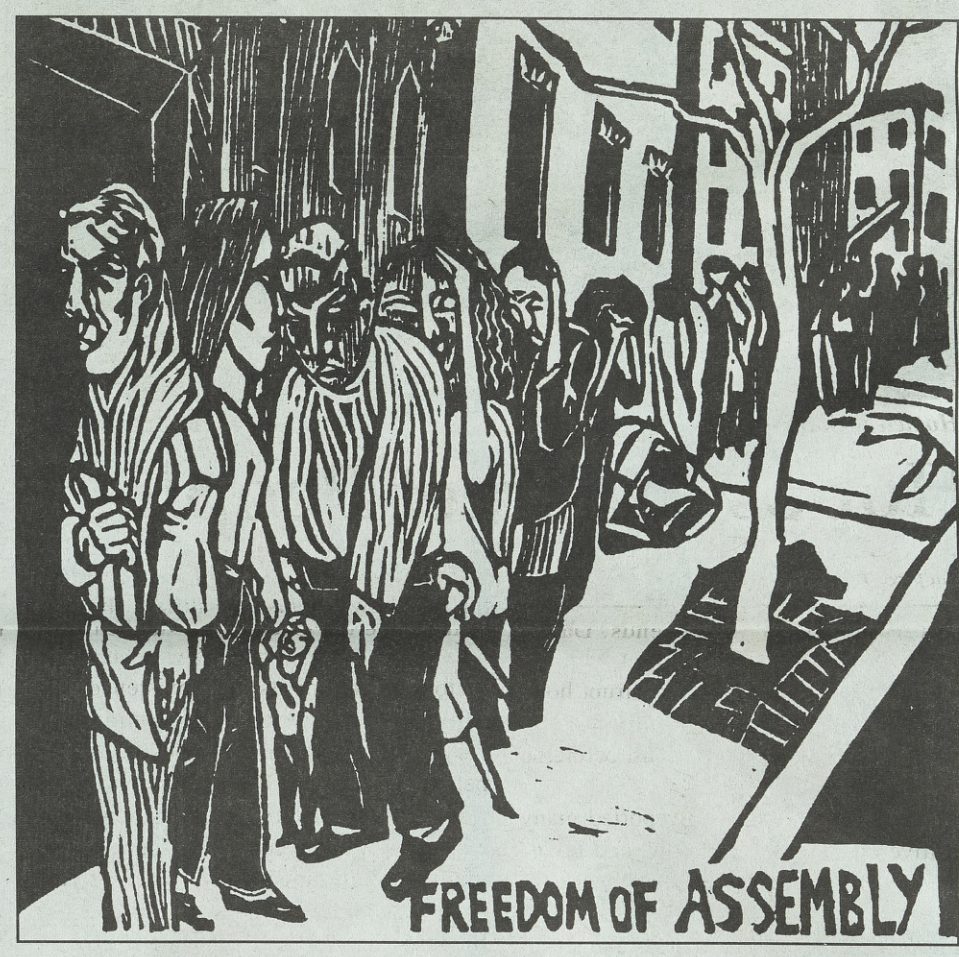
See **Hobos to Street People** *page 11*



"Mother And Two Children On The Road, Tulelake, Siskiyou County, California, 1939." Dorothea Lange photo

Library of Congress photograph, collection of de Saisset Museum, Santa Clara University

"Bread Line, 1935" Courtesy of M. Lee Stone Fine Prints Lithograph by Iver Rose



"Four Freedoms" [Freedom of Assembly] Linocut by Art Hazelwood

Hobos to Street People

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suffered such an eviction.

For Sances, "the symbol of the Sacred Heart is profound — Christ's compassion for us, the flawed ones." The piece came from Sances' "wish that people exhibited more compassion for people in need. There are wonderful Catholics committed to social action and helping people in distress, working hard to change the system so people aren't victimized" by a cruel eviction.

However, the piece is "meant to be a betrayal, too. This sacred heart that is holding them is also evicting them. The heart is the container of love," yet "the darker side of the piece" is that, "because they don't have the money to pay their rent, they are being evicted from this vessel of love — expelled from the community."

"Sacred Heart" symbolizes "the callousness that people allowed that to happen," Sances said. "The price of the callousness for those poor people, and the pain they suffer, is enormous."

URBAN VS. RURAL

Post-Ronald Reagan, Hazelwood observed, we have seen the destruction of the social safety net and a progressive downward slide into the devastating defunding of federal money for public housing in U.S. cities. Hazelwood's "Spirit of Abandon" and Claude Moller's "Housing Crisis: Condition Critical," render pictorially accessible the harsh statistics that show the shocking extent of the defunding of urban affordable housing.

Most people think of homelessness as urban. Ed Gould's artwork, "America's Forgotten Homeless People," charts the disappearance of rural affordable housing. Chandler said she worries about people in the country. "They couldn't survive like we can here (in the cities) because there is nothing for them out there."

STRUGGLE AND HOPE

Hazelwood compared today's poverty imagery with Depression-era art which refused to divest the poor of nobility or hope. He believes hope was stronger in Depression artists than today.

Rockwell Kent's skillful lithograph, "And Now Where?" etches an uprooted couple as in stone or steel, statue-like, peering lovingly together into their future. Richard Correll's "Drought" displays a proud farm woman, "strong, independent and able to deal with life's difficulties."

Both the attitudes of the uprooted and contemporary imagery mirror the often hopeless struggle of today's homelessness. After Travis' father lost his carpentry business and his mother her nursing job, their Detroit home was foreclosed. Travis left so he wouldn't burden them. He saw the noble couple in "And Now Where?" through a contemporary lens. The illustration reminded him that, despite their love, his parents could not verbalize their mutual pain.

In Kiki Smith's drawing, "Home," sleeping boots stick from a cardboard box. This image reminded Travis of his gratitude at being protected by a lowly cardboard box during sub-zero winter nights in Manhattan.

JaneInVain Winkelman compares her colorful "New Drop Dead Welfare Center" to Auschwitz-like ovens. She paints about her eviction, wishing for "free lethal injections. Why couldn't they just kill all of us then, and end our horrendous suffering? Wouldn't that be more humane?" Her "Greedy Landlords I Can't Pay Your Rent," seems a stress response to living perpetually on the edge.

Norman Rockwell's bygone illustrations are several times satirized in this show. His "Freedom from Want" is a homey Thanksgiving dinner. His "Freedom from Fear" depicts a couple putting their son to bed as the husband holds a paper with a World War II headline. The image suggests, "We're safe here in America."

By contrast, in Hazelwood's series, "Four Freedoms," "Freedom from Want" displays a homeless man's sign saying, "Beaten, robbed, help please." "Freedom of Assembly" is the right to line up for food outside a church like Glide. Hazelwood satirizes Rockwell's evocation of FDR's vision of a hopeful future and the failed dreams of 1950s America.

The words, "Everyone has a right," march across Robert Terrell's Market Street photographs brutally portraying an elderly homeless woman and an AIDS sufferer accompanied by a quote from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which the United States is a signatory, guaranteeing housing for all. The bitter reality mocks the Rockwell-like promise.

Jesus Barraza's San Francisco Print Collective poster bears the words: "How many Homeless people does it take to start a revolution?" Across it is written, "There are 15,000 homeless people in San Francisco. Is that enough?" A black silhouetted figure holding a gun poses before an orange shopping cart. "When that came out," Hazelwood observed, "it was vilified and mocked by *The Chronicle*."

"Poor people's rebellions are not unheard of," asserted Hazelwood. As the Depression began, dispossessed World War I veterans, the "Bonus Marchers," were denied promised government benefits. "When they protested in Washington," he said, "President Hoover ordered General MacArthur to clear the Mall, and he led the last cavalry charge in U.S. history against U.S. military veterans."

In 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King's Poor People's Campaign marched down that same Washington Mall. "It happens," muttered David Suttles, as he slid past the poster toward Eric Drooker's "Sleeping Giant," slumped over a street light, unaware of its powerful size.

Paul Boden, WRAP director, calls for a serious re-evaluation of federal response to homelessness. San Francisco officials created the "Care Not Cash" program, a backlash against the poor born from our government's addressing poverty by putting the blame on the poor and homeless as if something is wrong with them.

In the New Deal era, the government humanized, supported, and funded images of the poor. New York Mayor Fiorello La Guardia and the city public housing director paid an artist to create the 1936 poster about Manhattan's rundown tenements entitled, "Why Must We Always Have This? Why Not Housing?"

The New Deal government, said Boden, supported artists portraying a "broken system" which must be made new. Conversely, modern government and media promote images of poor and homeless people as "broken people" to be "fixed."

Boden said that the exhibit encourages our reassessment of the ways we see and talk about homelessness and poverty. "If we can bomb and rebuild Iraq," he said, "we can rebuild the Bayview." Massive war funding and bank bailouts tell us how quickly the country's sociopolitical will makes money available.

Curator Hazelwood said, "We've been through this before. We can rise to the occasion again. The government did something about the Depression. The government could do something about our current economic crisis, poverty, and homelessness. We don't have to live with this terrible situation. We can get through it."

This article first appeared in the May 2009 issue of *Street Spirit*.

Hobos to Street People

Artists' Responses to Homelessness from the New Deal to the Present

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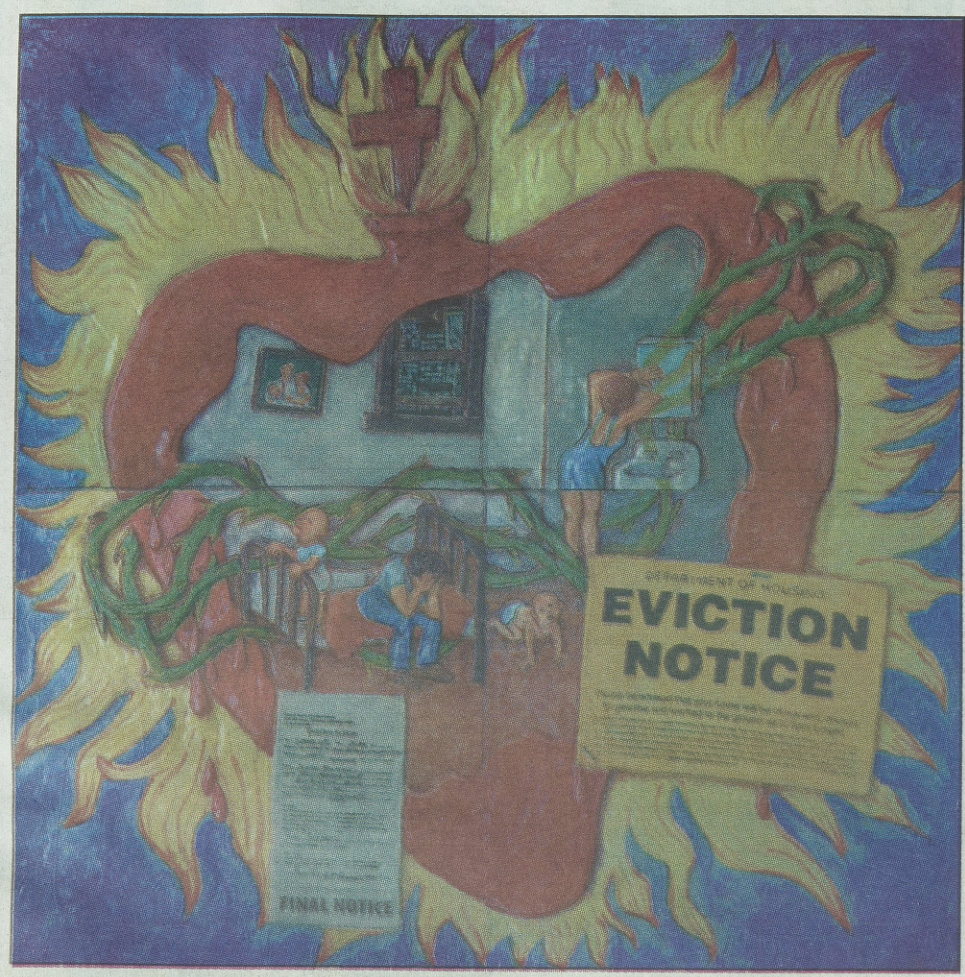
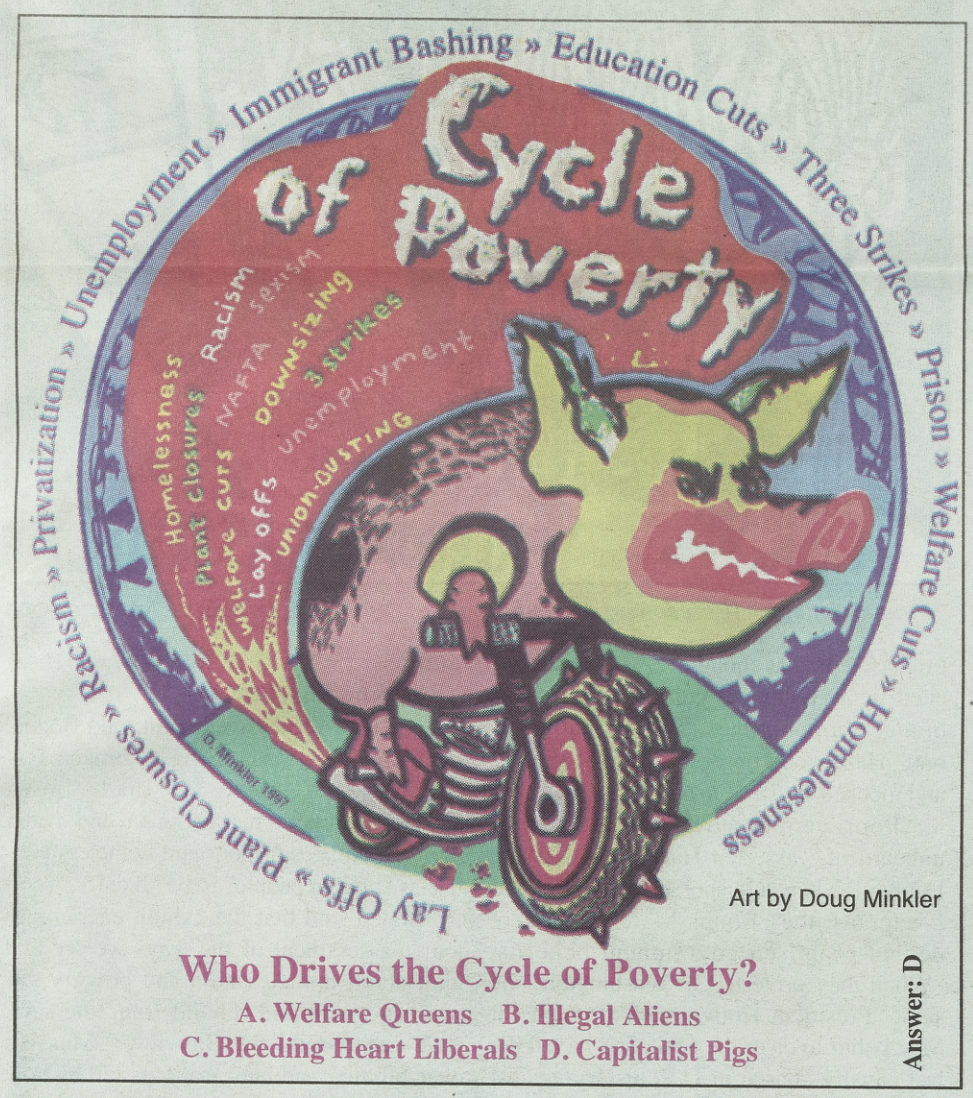
See more paintings from this exhibit on page 12 of this issue.

Hobos to Street People: Artists' Responses to Homelessness from the New Deal to the Present



"Sacred Heart" Jos Sances, ceramic tile

"RHONDA'S PLACE." Painting by Christine Hanlon, oil on canvas, 29 1/8" by 18"

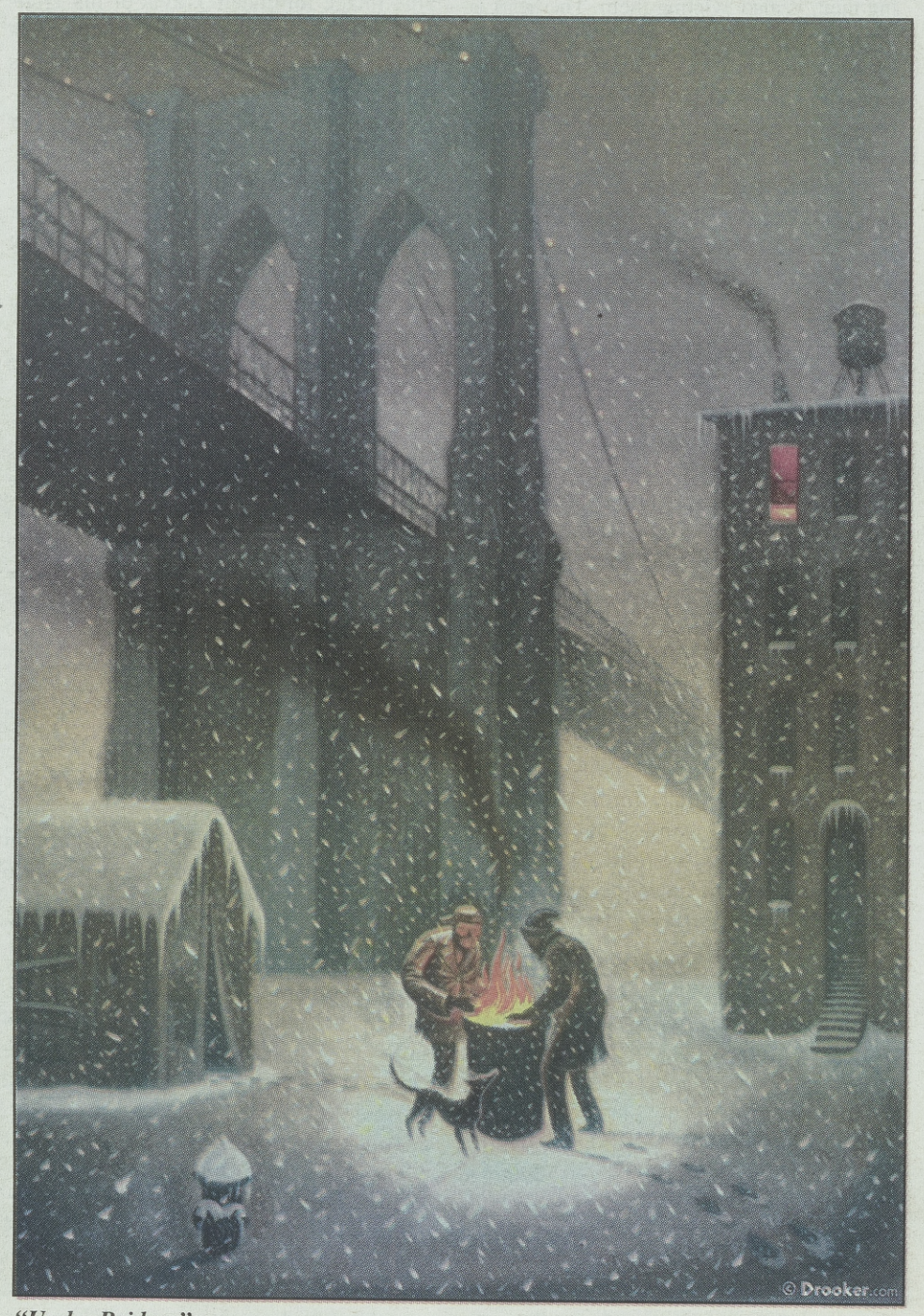


Art by Doug Minkler

Who Drives the Cycle of Poverty?

A. Welfare Queens B. Illegal Aliens
C. Bleeding Heart Liberals D. Capitalist Pigs

Answer: D



"Under Bridges" Painting by Eric Drooker

"Homeless Park; Green" Art by Anthony Ryan, woodcut print